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ABSTRACT

The purpose of these studies was to determine if a speaker using relatively restricted language would be judged more negatively by middle class listeners than a speaker using relatively elaborated language. The subjects for the first experiment were sixty-three volunteers from an indergraduate speech class. Two versions of a message were recorded in length. Half of the subjects were told that the speaker was communicating in a stimulated interview for a teaching position and the other half were told that the speaker was communicating with another student in an informal classroom exercise. The results indicated that there is no evidence of interaction between situational formality and message elaboration. The restricted version produced more negative ratings. The second study further explored the determinants of the main effects for elaboration and restriction. The communication situation was constant for all subjects and the situation was described as formal. The results indicated that lexically restricted message versions were judged more negatively than lexically diverse ones. The restricted version produced more positive ratings of the attitudinally neutral concept. (WR)

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# TWO STUDIES ON COMMUNICATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF ELABORATED AND RESTRICTED LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE

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For over a decade theorists and researchers have shown interest in restricted and elaborated language performance. Definitions have varied across fields, but generally the elaboration-restriction distinction refers to the degree of lexical and syntactic redundancy in speech. On the basis of Bernstein's seminal work (1958, 1959), some sociolinguists have characterized the linguistic codes of low-SES speakers as being more redundant than the linguistic codes of middle-or high-SES speakers. Other researchers have questioned this characterization and have suggested that degree of linguistic elaboration is determined by the situation in which communication occurs rather than by social class (Bradac & Konsky, 1973; Labov, 1970). Still others have hypothesized that degree of elaboration relates to individual differences, e.g., differences in levels of trait anxiety (Feldstein & Jaffee, 1962)

Though there is disagreement about the extent to which linguistic elaboration varies within classes of speakers, researchers have generally agreed that the most interesting research questions pertain to <u>determinants</u> of elaboration. We believe that equally interesting questions can be asked about the communicational <u>consequences</u> of using elaborated or restricted language. For example, what are the effects of elaborated and restricted language on listeners' attitudes toward a speaker and his message? Though some suggestions have been made about cognitive consequences of restricted and elaborated codes, i.e., the extent to which these codes affect language users' thought processes (Bernstein, 1962, 1970), as far as we know no research has rigorously investigated the effects of elaborated and restricted language on listeners' judgments. This is an important research problem, for

listeners' judgments of language are implicated in personal and professional decisions affecting speakers (Hopper & Williams, 1973).

## Related Research, Rationale, and Predictions

Numerous researchers have explored effects of other code features on judgments of speakers by manipulating pronunciation, accent, or dialect. It has been found, for example, that listeners can make rather consistent and accurate estimates of a speaker's status on the basis of spoken language cues (Harms, 1961). Several studies have shown that nonstandard dialects produce relatively negative evaluations of speakers and their messages compared to standard dialects (Buck, 1968; Lambert, Ainsfeld, & Yeni-Komshian, 1965; Hurt & Weaver, 1972). Most relevant to our research are the studies which have found that relatively nonfluent speech, an indicant of high anxiety, produces negative attitudinal effects (Miller & Hewgill, 1964; Sereno & Hawkins, 1967). Nonfluency, as operationalized in these studies, is partially a linguistic variable and is to some extent related to code redundancy; for example, increases in "repetition" serve to decrease a message's type-token ratio, a measure of lexical diversity.

Taken together, these studies suggest that code features which deviate from the linguistic norms of listeners may produce negative outcomes for a speaker. This is especially likely when deviations violate the norms of relatively high-status listeners or when they reflect negative emotional states, e.g., high anxiety.

It seems likely, therefore, that a speaker using relatively restricted language will be judged more negatively than a speaker using relatively elaborated language, at least by middle class listeners. Restricted language may be attributed to lower social status or to high anxiety. Both increased

anxiety and decreased status seem likely to affect adversely ratings of speaker credibility and message effectiveness. For our purposes an elaborated message will be one which exhibits relatively great degrees of lexical diversity and syntactic complexity. A restricted message will be one which is lexically less diverse and syntactically less complex. (More precise distinctions will be offered below.)

There is some reason to believe that judgments about restricted and elaborated messages will be influenced by the situation in which communication occurs. Some scholars have argued that restricted messages are more appropriate in informal situations where role distance between communicators is minimal and that elaborated messages are more appropriate in formal situations where role distance is great (Hall, 1966; Joos, 1967). This suggests that a restricted message may be judged less negatively if listeners perceive the communication situation to be informal. An elaborated message, on the other hand, may be judged less positively in an informal situation. From another perspective (Feldstein & Jaffee, 1962) it could be argued that a restricted message will be judged less negatively in a formal situation, for listeners may perceive the speaker to be understandably anxious. Conversely, in an informal situation high anxiety may be seen as relatively pathological, thus a restricted message may be judged more negatively. Since both possibilities seem plausible, we will offer only a general prediction: There will be an interaction between message type (elaborated vs. restricted) and perceived formality of the situation (formal vs. informal). Scales pertaining to perceived speaker anxiety and message appropriateness may help us to explain this interaction.

## Method

### Design and Analysis

The predictions suggest a 2 x 2 factorial design with two between subjects variables. Listeners judged one version of the message on several scales (described below), so a multivariate analysis of variance was used to analyze the data.

### Subjects

Sixty-three volunteers from undergraduate speech classes at The University of Iowa were randomly assigned to conditions. The subjects were predominantly middle-class, midwestern caucasians.

### Elaborated and Restricted Messages

Two versions of a message were recorded by a male speaker whom the researchers deemed a competent actor. Compared to the restricted version, the elaborated version exhibited a greater ratio of adjectival, adverbial, nominal, and verbal types to tokens and fewer reinforcement cues ("you know?," "huh?," etc.). It also exhibited a greater diversity of verb tenses, a greater number and diversity of subordinate clauses, a higher ratio of passive to active constructions, and a greater number of complex verbal stems. These lexical and syntactic features have been found to discriminate between restricted and elaborated language performance (Coulthard & Robinson, 1968; Lawton, 1964; Robinson, 1965; Robinson & Creed, 1968).

The two versions contained approximately 600 words and both were approximately five minutes in length. Both versions were audiotaped and the speaker's delivery was kept as constant as possible. Trained raters evaluated both versions on scales pertaining to rate, voice quality, and articulation, and they did not perceive differences. Also a replication of this study using

written messages was conducted subsequently to test the alternative hypothesis that obtained differences were in fact produced by differences in the speaker's delivery across versions.

The content of the message was remarks which could plausibly occur in both a formal interview and an informal chat with a student, and it was constant across versions. The remarks were about personal background and educational concerns. Subjects were told that several segments from the interview or chat had been spliced together to produce four minutes of continuous discourse. During approximately half of this time the speaker argued in support of a fictitious, attitudinally neutral concept (a new book in psychology). This allowed us to examine the effects of elaboration and situation on the speaker's persuasiveness.

Formality of the Situation

Half of the subjects were told that the speaker they were about to hear was communicating in a simulated interview for a teaching position and the hypothetical interviewer was described as the dean of a college of education. The other half were told that the speaker was communicating spontaneously with another student during an informal classroom exercise. Some details about the physical setting were given in both cases.

Measures

Seven-interval rating scales were used to obtain information about subjects' reactions to the speaker and his message. The scales pertained to the following categories: evaluation of the speaker (competence, trustworthiness, dynamism, socioeconomic status, and anxiety level), attitude toward message content (agreement with the speaker's position regarding the attitudinally neutral concept and effectiveness of arguments), and evaluation of the speaker's language (effectiveness, appropriateness, and similarity to the listeners' language).

Procedures

Subjects appeared individually at a designated time and place, and they were initially given a packet containing general instructions, the formality induction, rating scales, and demographic questions. After a subject read the instructions and the formality induction, an experimenter played one of the versions of the message. The subject then responded to the scales and the demographic items. All subjects were debriefed shortly after the study was completed.

Results

1. There is no evidence of an interaction between situational formality and message elaboration for the twelve scales used in this study.

2. Consistent, significant main effects indicate that the restricted version produced more negative ratings of a speaker's competence, dynamism, and argumentative effectiveness. The restricted message was also judged as more inappropriate for the occasion, regardless of the ostensible situation in which it was delivered. Ratings of anxiety and socioeconomic status were also negatively affected by the restricted version. The speaker's sentence structures and vocabulary were judged more negatively when they were restricted. Finally, the listeners suggested that the speaker producing the restricted message would be an inferior teacher. We found no evidence of differences between conditions for ratings of the attitudinally neutral concept and none for ratings of similarity to the listeners' language.

3. Interestingly, the pattern of differences was identical in our replication with written messages (n=40).

## Second Study

A second study was conducted to explore further the determinants of the main effects for elaboration and restriction. Specifically, syntactic complexity and lexical diversity were manipulated orthogonally in a two-factor design. Thus four versions of a message were created: high syntactic complexity-high lexical diversity, high syntactic complexity-low lexical diversity, low syntactic complexity-high lexical diversity, and low syntactic complexity-low lexical diversity. We hoped that this would yield information about the relative importance of syntax and lexicon in determining listeners' reactions to elaborated and restricted messages.

In this study information about the communication situation was constant for all subjects. The situation was described as a formal one. As in the first study, a single speaker taped all versions and message content was held constant. The procedure was similar in essential respects to that of the first study. Subjects were 52 undergraduate volunteers from speech classes at The University of Iowa.

## Results

1. A main effect for lexicon indicates that the lexically restricted message versions were judged more negatively than the lexically diverse ones. The pattern of differences was strikingly similar to that of the previous study.
2. There was only one significant difference between the syntactically elaborated and syntactically restricted messages and this indicated that the restricted version produced more positive ratings of the attitudinally neutral concept. This difference may be reasonably attributed to chance.

## Discussion

It appears that highly restricted messages may negatively affect listeners' judgments of a speaker's credibility, socioeconomic status, anxiety level, and

argumentative effectiveness. We have some evidence which suggests that these effects are largely a product of lexical redundancy, i.e., restricted vocabulary. We also have some evidence that these effects are independent of mode of presentation. The fact that we did not obtain a significant interaction between situational formality and message elaboration may be attributed to the strong difference between the two versions, to the weakness of our situational inductions, or to both. We believe that other cues, e.g., visual ones, might make situational norms more salient and that judgments of elaboration and restriction may be influenced by these.

Numerous professions and agencies use interviewers to obtain information from persons, and evaluations, decisions, and recommendations are often based upon an interviewee's verbal performance. Our results suggest that a restricted performance may negatively affect an interviewer's judgments of a client or prospective employee, for example. Conceivably, negative judgments may be communicated to interviewees through nonverbal cues and this may produce increasingly deteriorating performances.

At this point, we have run only three studies, all of which have used the same message. The evaluators of our message versions were undergraduate students, most of whom were midwestern caucasions, all of whom were without special training in language analysis. Obviously, partial replications with different messages and different auditors should be conducted to probe the generalizability of these findings. Here are some research questions which strike us as potentially important:

1. How do listeners' perceptions of a speaker's social status affect their judgments of elaborated and restricted performance?

2. How do listeners' initial attitudes toward a speaker's position influence their judgments of these performance modes?
3. How lexically restricted must a message be before listeners react negatively? Conversely, how lexically diverse must a message be before listeners react positively?
4. Does special training in language analysis, e.g., the training given to speech pathologists, influence judgments of these performance modes?

Currently, we are conducting programmatic research on some of these questions. Hopefully, the results will suggest some interesting qualifications of our main effects and will indicate avenues for further research on this language variable, as well as others.

| | | Condition (Oral) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Elab. | Restrict. |
| Scale 1 (Competence): | $\bar{X}$ = | 17.75 | 13.90 |
| | SD = | 3.50 | 3.27 |
| Scale 3 (Dynamism): | | 16.27 | 11.61 |
| | | 3.44 | 2.91 |
| Scale 4 (Tension): | | 4.05 | 2.77 |
| | | 1.37 | 1.18 |
| Scale 5 (SES): | | 3.37 | 2.89 |
| | | .69 | .68 |
| Scale 7 (Appropriateness): | | 4.68 | 3.49 |
| | | 1.30 | 1.24 |
| Scale 8 (Syntax): | | 3.81 | 2.15 |
| | | 1.25 | .77 |
| Scale 9 (Vocabulary): | | 4.31 | 2.90 |
| | | 1.35 | 1.41 |
| Scale 11 (Arg. Effectiveness): | | 4.62* | 3.97 |
| | | 1.49 | 1.44 |
| Scale 12 (Teach. Effect.): | | 4.50 | 3.32 |
| | | 1.22 | 1.18 |

Selected Means and Standard Deviations

(All differences are significant at $p<.01$ unless otherwise indicated)

*$p<.08$

| | | Condition (Oral) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Lex. Diverse | Lex. Restrict |
| Scale 1: | $\bar{X}$ = | 17.88 | 13.18 |
| | SD = | 3.65 | 3.81 |
| Scale 3: | | 14.45 | 11.67 |
| | | 3.11 | 3.23 |
| Scale 4: | | 3.56* | 2.92 |
| | | 1.63 | 1.55 |
| Scale 5: | | 3.39 | 2.66 |
| | | .67 | .79 |
| Scale 7: | | 4.36 | 3.14 |
| | | 1.48 | 1.25 |
| Scale 8: | | 3.31 | 2.11 |
| | | .98 | .99 |
| Scale 9: | | 4.12 | 2.66 |
| | | 1.18 | 1.35 |
| Scale 11: | | 4.27* | 3.73 |
| | | 1.38 | 1.52 |
| Scale 12: | | 4.55 | 3.11 |
| | | 1.32 | 1.52 |

Selected Means and Standard Deviations

(All differences are significant at $p<.01$ unless otherwise indicated)

*ns

| | | Condition (Written) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Elab. | Restrict. |
| Scale 1: | $\bar{X}$ = | 16.05 | 12.26 |
| | SD = | 2.56 | 3.24 |
| Scale 3: | | 15.38* | 13.10 |
| | | 2.66 | 3.55 |
| Scale 4: | | 2.90 | 2.00 |
| | | 1.10 | .91 |
| Scale 5: | | 3.09 | 2.47 |
| | | .81 | .71 |
| Scale 7: | | 3.76*** | 3.26 |
| | | 1.52 | 1.13 |
| Scale 8: | | 2.61 | 1.89 |
| | | .93 | .78 |
| Scale 9: | | 3.33** | 2.58 |
| | | 1.32 | 1.22 |
| Scale 11: | | 4.09 | 2.94 |
| | | 1.09 | 1.29 |
| Scale 12: | | 3.90* | 2.99 |
| | | 1.04 | 1.04 |

Selected Means and Standard Deviations

(All differences are significant at $p<.01$ unless otherwise indicated)

*$p<.05$
**$p>.05<.10$
***ns

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